

SEAL DESIGNER TELLS OF ORIGIN

Red Cross Stamp Born in Delaware November 26, 1907.

PROGRESS WAS SLOW

Merchants Reluctant to Push It; Demand Now Exceeds Expectations.

By MISS EMILY P. RISSELL.
Creator of the Red Cross Christmas Seal.

In October, 1907, the tuberculosis situation in Delaware was most promising. A group of doctors had started a small sanatorium on borrowed ground in an out of the way place and were rapidly finding it impossible to maintain. The Delaware Red Cross desired to come to their relief, but had no funds. There was very little knowledge or interest in the state about tuberculosis, and educational work was vitally necessary.

I was the secretary of the Delaware Red Cross at that time. I had read Jacob Riis' article on the children's Christmas hospital in Denmark, printed in the Outlook of July 6, 1907. This seal was issued to maintain a children's hospital, and had been allowed to be sold through the Danish postoffice. It raised sufficient money to obtain the sanatorium. The idea came to me that the Red Cross was partly a government agency, and therefore the postoffice in this country might admit the sale of a Red Cross seal. At the same time, the great power of the Christmas appeal seemed entirely suitable in combination with the Red Cross. More than all, I realized the great educational value of the penny seal, which would reach the poorest as a symbol of the fight against tuberculosis.

I made the proposition of the Christmas seal in our October, 1907, meeting of the Red Cross, but there was no money to finance it, as the Red Cross dues could not be diverted to this. So I found two friends who were willing to stand back of the project to the extent of \$40, and armed with this guarantee, at a special meeting of the executive committee at my home in Wilmington, Del., on November 24, 1907, it was decided that a Christmas seal be issued by the Delaware Red Cross chapter and placed on the market December 7, 1907.

This naturally left little time to get out the seal. I sketched the design, had it put in shape by an artist friend, and the first order, a few thousand only, was given to the printers. The Delaware Federation of Women's clubs, of whose social service committee I was chairman, quickly consented to aid in the sale, and all Wilmington stores agreed to sell it for the Red Cross. The Delaware newspapers took up the idea with enthusiasm, knowing the needs of tuberculosis work in this state.

I then went to Philadelphia, and obtained the invaluable co-operation of Leigh Mitchell Hedges of the North American, whose name should never be forgotten in connection with the Christmas seal. He threw the whole weight of the North American in favor of the project in Philadelphia as well as Wilmington, while I interviewed the advertising managers of the large stores, asking them since so many Wilmingtonians dealt with them, whether they would not put the seals on sale for us. This was the more necessary, as many Delawareans did no shopping at home, but bought almost everything in the large Philadelphia stores. The advertising managers were frankly incredulous of any sale. They told me that the Dennison seals sold for a cent, and were much prettier than our humble

little bantling. But the interests of their Delaware customers weighed with them, and although some stores would not go into the sale, several of the large ones did so.

In spite of the opinion of the advertising experts, the Christmas seal took hold like wildfire. Before they were ready the rush for them began, but with a scant three weeks before Christmas, the printers could no keep up with the demand. In Wilmington, the advertising man of the DuPont company designed envelopes to be used for the sale, and mail sales were added to those in the stores.

General Bird, chairman of the Delaware Red Cross, and myself, went down to Washington in December and interviewed the then postmaster, General Mr. Hitchcock. He told us it was absolutely impossible for the postoffice to sell the seals, as our laws differed from those in Denmark. This was a great blow to our hopes. But we got his final consent to the use of booths in postoffice corridors. These booths, one on each side of a great feature at once. The school heads in Delaware also allowed the sale of seals by school children.

Our almost hope had been to sell 10,000 seals, and this was all we had ordered, but altogether we had printed and sold about 40,000.

With \$1,000 of the money raised by this first Red Cross seal sale the Delaware Red Cross paid the first installment on the site of the first tuberculosis sanatorium in Delaware, Hope Farm.

By this time, the interest of the whole state was aroused, and in the next legislature the Red Cross backed a bill for a state tuberculosis commission, with an appropriation of \$25,000 a year, and put it through both houses unanimously, this being the start of the permanent tuberculosis work in our state.

In December, 1907, in the middle of the campaign, the representatives of the Delaware chapter reported the amazing success of the Christmas seal at the annual meeting of the National Red Cross in Washington, and an endorsement was given heartily. In 1908 I succeeded in interesting the national Red Cross in a Red Cross Christmas seal for the nation. They were also under the same difficulty of not having any funds to appropriate for the purpose. But I had witnessed the pulling power of the seal, and I offered to pledge enough collateral to them to secure them against loss, and also to undertake the newspaper campaign myself. They finally decided to start the seal. I got the newspaper gazetteer of the United States, and sent out 4,000 letters to the leading newspapers of every state in the union. These letters explained the Christmas seal idea, and asked for orders to be sent in to the national headquarters in Washington.

Second Sale Amassed Promoters. Although I had warned them of the surprising capacities of the seal, the national Red Cross was not prepared for the rush of orders that practically swamped their office force. However, they were able to supply in the end the national market.

I went on to New York to meet the Red Cross workers there just before the campaign, and New York made a record of the seal, being really one of the most enthusiastic cities in the world over any new and basic idea.

The rest of the story is known to everybody—how the educational value of the little sticker has kept bringing the thought of fighting the great white plague home to the school child and the newboy, the alien and the illiterate, as well as the leaders of health work in our communities.

Everybody knows the value of the little sticker has kept bringing the thought of fighting the great white plague home to the school child and the newboy, the alien and the illiterate, as well as the leaders of health work in our communities.



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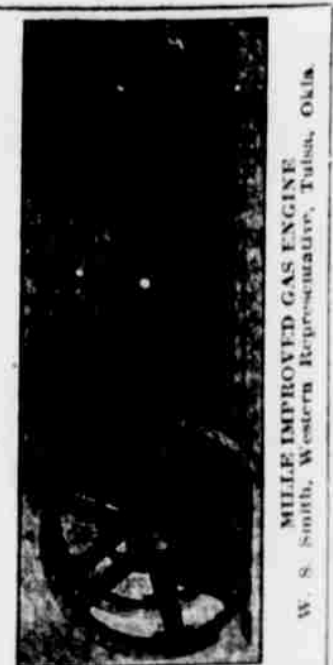
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